Multimedia Project Work: Developing Korean Pre-Service Teachers' English Language Competence

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ABSTRACT

The changing recruitment examination of secondary public English schoolteachers has increased pre-service English teachers' ongoing demand for English language competence. The test has placed much focus on the assessment of the four macro language skills (ie, reading, listening, writing and speaking) rather than one or two language skills. Accordingly, the pre-service teacher training programs of teachers' universities in Korea are expected to respond to such language demands. How can English Language Teaching (ELT) modules of the teacher professional development programs develop the English language proficiency of the pre-service teachers? This paper explores potentials of project works. A project work embedding in an ELT-related module was designed and conducted in a pre-service English language teacher training program at a Korean university.

Key words: Project work, teacher education, developing English proficiency

I. Introduction

Much emphasis on the English four skills (ie, reading, listening, writing & speaking) at the public secondary schoolteacher recruitment examination of English has led pre-service English language teachers to need to develop their language competence regarding overall skills. In line with the test change, curriculums of pre-service teacher training programs at teachers colleges are expected to respond to such language development demands. This study explores a potential of a project work in an ELT module in terms of the language demands.
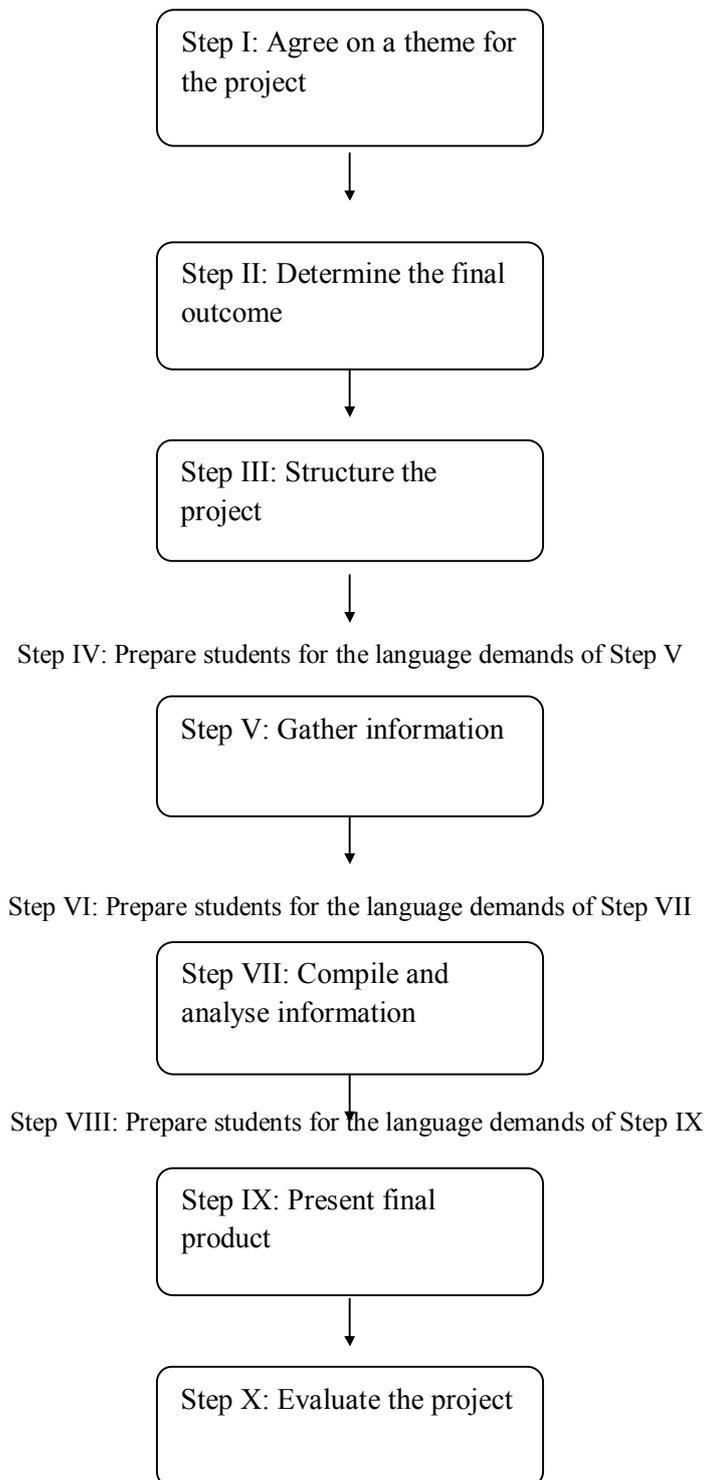
II. Literature Review

A project in project work is an extended task. Learners in project work conduct the task through an in-depth investigation of real-world subject matter and topics of interest to students. It has four stages: selecting topics, making plans, doing research and sharing results with others (Moss & Duzer 1998). As far as project work in ELT is concerned, Stoller (1997) proposes a 10-step sequence of activities with some language intervention steps (I V, VI, and VIII) are optional, depending on the language proficiency and needs of the learners (see Figure 1).

The extended task in project work can integrate the four skills of English (reading, listening, writing & speaking) (Moss & Duzer 1998:4). Although there are instructional models and lists of resources, very little empirical research on project work in ELT has been conducted (Thomas 2000). This empirical research based on an EFL context was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What were the participants' perspectives on developing their four macro skills of English?
2. What were the participants' perspectives on developing their knowledge of an ELT subject, in this case, Multimedia in ELT?

[Figure 1] Developing a project in a language classroom (Stoller, 1997: 6)

Step I: Agree on a theme for the project

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Step II: Determine the final outcome

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Step III: Structure the project

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Step IV: Prepare students for the language demands of Step V

Step V: Gather information

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Step VI: Prepare students for the language demands of Step VII

Step VII: Compile and analyse information

Step VIII: Prepare students for the language demands of Step IX

Step IX: Present final product

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Step X: Evaluate the project

III. Research Methodology

Based on the two research questions, a multimedia project session is designed and implemented in a course of a pre-service English language teacher education program in Korea. The data is collected mainly through reflective student course evaluation after the project session. The research participants of 13 were all the teacher's college students who would obtain the teaching license of English for secondary schools after graduation.

A four-week project work session was designed to pursue the research questions. The session is a part of a credited course, Multimedia in ELT, in the Department of English Education at Chonnam National University, South Korea. It was held for four weeks in October 2007. The following table shows the outline of the session.

[Table 1] The outline of the 4-week course (October 2007)

Stage	Week	Duration	Activity
I	1	1 week	Preparation (e.g., arranging groups, obtaining e-mail accounts and web-café accounts)
II	2	1 week	'Agreeing on a theme for the project', 'determining the final outcome' and 'structuring the project'. Then, providing 'language demands' for the next step.
III	3	1 week	'Gathering information', 'compiling & analysing information' & 'presenting final project'. Between each step, providing 'language demands'.
IV	4	1/2 week	Uploading the portfolios to the internet
V	4	2/2 week	'Evaluating the project' through individual oral presentation
Total			4 weeks

Stages I, II and III were conducted on both online and offline. In a conventional classroom, the students were engaged in the production of their projects. At the same time, they were also involved with online activities on the course café exchanging their findings regarding their projects after their research. Stage IV required each group to design their online café and upload their group project portfolios on their café.

IV. Results and Discussion

The written student reflective course evaluations after the project session are a primary source to collect the data for the research questions. It was conducted through a two-fold format: the development of their English proficiency and their technology use. The former contains four sections according to the four macro skills of English (ie, reading, listening, writing and speaking). The multimedia project embedded course had two primary goals: the development of the participant language and technology use. The two elements contributed to

the success of the course: the inclusion of a teacher-centered approach and the provision of abundant language use.

This seemingly foreign approach of multimedia project work has proved to be effective in a pre-service teacher training program of English in Korea, in terms of the development of the participant English proficiency and technology competence in use. The key element when it comes to the application of this approach is the combination of student-/teacher-centered approach. For example, the course allocated teacher-centered language input of writing and presentation at some stages, Stage III and IV, and later, Stage IV before the student production of the project online provided technology input (see Table 3.1). Apart from these stages, student-centered learning including group work primarily took place. Such a combination of a teacher-/student-centered approach appeared to help situate the foreign approach in the Korean context. Teacher-centred instruction used in the course is language and technology input.

Another element to contribute to the success of the approach in this study is the provision of abundant opportunities to practice English including writing and speaking that are required as parts of the teacher recruitment examination. The implementation of an 'English Only Zone' class and internet-based language practice are examples.

VI. Conclusion

In order to reach the current language demand to the pre-service Korean teacher of the English language in relation to the changing national secondary schoolteacher recruitment examination of the language, the potential of a project work is implemented in an ELT subject at a pre-service teacher training program. The study shows positive responses. The findings show that it developed the language competence as well as the aim of the ELT course, the technology competence. The characteristics of the research study include: the combination of teacher-centered and student-centered approaches; the use of 'English Only Zone'; and the internet. The first trait helps acclimate to the foreign language learning environment. The other two elements in which the participants are engaged with communication provide interactive language practice to a great degree.

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